

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7387
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USMISSION USNATO
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ATHENS 7376

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT--PARA THREE)

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, GR
SUBJECT: LOCAL ELECTIONS: OCTOBER 15 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS
CASTING LONGER SHADOW

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. NOTHING CAN BREAK THE GREEK APPETITE FOR
POLITICS -- NOT EVEN THE AUGUST HOLIDAYS WHICH HAVE AGAIN, AS
EVERY AUGUST, ALL BUT EMPTIED ATHENS. THIS YEAR THE POT HAS BEEN
KEPT BOILING THROUGH THE SUMMER BY PREPARATIONS FOR THE OCTOBER 15
NATIONWIDE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS. WHILE BY DEFINITION THE
ELECTIONS ARE DOMESTIC IN FOCUS THEY DO HAVE AN INDIRECT
FOREIGN POLICY DIMENSION BECAUSE THE PRE-ELECTORAL ATMOSPHERE
WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY REINFORCE KARAMANLIS' GENERALLY CAUTIOUS
APPROACH TO FOREIGN AFFAIRS. END SUMMARY.

2. DESPITE THE FACT THAT MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN GREECE ARE
CONTESTS RUN ON LOCAL ISSUES AND DOMINATED BY LOCAL PERSONALITIES,
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OVER THE YEARS THEY HAVE ALWAYS TAKEN ON THE COLOR OF A NATIONAL
PLEBISCITE OF SORTS. VICTORY OR DEFEAT FOR THE GOVERNMENT IS
MEASURED LARGELY IN THE NUMBER OF MAYORALTY RACES WON BY PRO-
GOVERNMENT CANDIDATES. THE ELECTIONS THEMSELVES ARE ACTUALLY
TWO STEP AFFAIRS (AS IN FRANCE) -- IN MUNICIPALITIES OR COMMUNES
WHERE NO PARTY GETS AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY IN THE FIRST ROUND,
THERE IS A RUN OFF -- OR SECOND ROUND -- THIS TIME ON OCTOBER 22

-- BETWEEN THE TWO TOP LISTS OF CANDIDATES. IN GREECE'S FRAGMENTED PARTY STRUCTURE, PARTIES USUALLY TRY TO FORM LOCAL COALITIONS TRADING OFF SUPPORT IN DIFFERENT MUNICIPALITIES IN WHAT COULD BE DESCRIBED AS COMPENSATION PACTS.

3. THE OCTOBER ELECTIONS, IN SOME 260 MUNICIPALITIES AND 5,800 COMMUNES, WILL PROBABLY ONCE AGAIN BE CAST AS A PLEBISCITE, DESPITE THE GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TO PORTRAY THEM AS A "NON-POLITICAL" AFFAIR. THE OPPORTUNITY TO GIVE THE GOVERNMENT A BLOODY NOSE IS AN ATTRACTIVE ONE AND THE OPPOSITION IS REACHING FOR UNITY IN ORDER TO STRIKE THE BLOW, REPEATING ITS 1975 SUCCESS IN VIRTUALLY EVERY LOCAL MATCH. FOR ITS PART, THE GOVERNMENT IS ENGAGED IN A DAMAGE LIMITATION EFFORT -- SINCE IT IS MATHEMATICALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR IT TO EMERGE ON TOP AGAINST THE UNITED FORCES OF ITS OPPONENTS. THIS EFFORT IS CONCENTRATING ON THE MAYORALTY ELECTION IN ATHENS. GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION ALIKE SEEM TO HAVE CONCLUDED THAT A GOG WIN IN ATHENS WOULD GREATLY DIMINISH THE PSYCHOLOGICAL/POLITICAL EFFECTS OF THE FAILURE OF PRO-GOVERNMENT CANDIDATES IN OTHER RACES AROUND THE COUNTRY.

4. THE OPPOSITION EFFORTS TO REACH AGREEMENT HAVE BEEN SPEARHEADED BY PASOK AND THE COMMUNISTS, WITH THE UNION OF THE DEMOCRATIC CENTER (I.E. ITS LEADER ZIGHDIS) MAKING AN UNSUCCESSFUL BID FOR LEADERSHIP IN THIS AREA. IT IS OF NOTE THAT PAPANDREOU, APPARENTLY IN PURSUIT OF SHORT TERM POLITICAL GAINS, HAS FOR THE MOMENT LET UP ON HIS EFFORTS TO DISTINGUISH HIMSELF FROM THE

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COMMUNISTS IN THE EYES OF THE VOTERS AND THE MILITARY, AND IS VISIBLY WORKING OUT COMPENSATION PACTS WITH THE COMMUNISTS (ESPECIALLY THE MOSCOW-ORIENTED KKE EXTERIOR) FOR THE ELECTIONS. THUS, WHILE PASOK DENIED ON AUGUST 22 IT IS SEEKING TO CREATE A "POPULAR FRONT", AS CHARGED BY THE GOG, IT DID PROMISE TO CONTINUE TO COOPERATE WITH THE OPPOSITION PARTIES IN THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS AND IN THE TRADE UNION FIELD. SENSING A POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY IN ALL THIS OPPOSITION COZINESS, THE GOG HAS HAMMERED THE THEME THAT ITS OPPONENTS ARE FORMING A "POPULAR FRONT", A SPECTRE THAT STILL BRINGS CHILLS TO MANY GREEKS.

5. ACTUALLY, IT IS CLEAR THAT SOMETHING LESS THAN HARMONY HAS PREVAILED IN THE NEGOTIATIONS AMONG THE OPPOSITION FORCES. THE COMMUNISTS, WE ARE RELIABLY TOLD, ARE PUT OUT BY PAPANDREOU'S EFFORTS TO THROW PASOK'S WEIGHT AROUND. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO COMMUNIST PARTIES HAVE PREVENTED ALL PARTIES FROM SITTING DOWN AT ONE TABLE TO DISCUSS WHO WILL SUPPORT WHOM, NECESSITATING CLUMSY BILATERAL MEETINGS AMONG THE VARIOUS OPPOSITION PARTIES. THE UNION OF THE DEMOCRATIC CENTER (UDC) AND THE UNITED DEMOCRATIC LEFT (EDA) ARE PUT OUT AT THE CRUMBS THEY ARE GETTING. NEVERTHELESS, THE OPPOSITION HAS APPARENTLY COME TO AGREEMENT ON COMMON CANDIDATES IN SOME, BUT FAR FROM ALL,

RACES. THOUGH AGREEMENT ON A CANDIDATE FOR ATHENS HAS ELUDED THEM AND THE JOCKEYING ELSEWHERE CONTINUES TO BE FIERCE, MOST LIKELY THEY WILL ACHIEVE COMMON AGREEMENT ON A LARGE NUMBER OF CANDIDATES.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ATHENS 7376

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

6. THE GOG SEEMS TO HAVE EARLY SETTLED ON ITS CANDIDATE IN ATHENS -- MINISTER OF CULTURE GEORGIOS PLYTAS, THE POPULAR PRE-JUNTA MAYOR OF ATHENS. PLYTAS HIMSELF TOLD US RECENTLY THAT HE IS RELUCTANTLY ENTERING THE FRAY AT THE PRIME MINISTER'S INSISTENCE AND EXPECTS TO WIN -- AN EXPECTATION SHARED BY MANY BUT CERTAINLY NOT ALL OBSERVERS, ESPECIALLY IF THERE IS A UNITED OPPOSITION CANDIDATE. TO RUN, PLYTAS WILL HAVE TO RESIGN HIS MINISTERIAL POSITION NO LATER THAN SEPTEMBER 28.

7. LACKING PARTIES WITH WHICH IT CAN FORM AN ALLIANCE IN THE ELECTIONS, THE GOG CONTINUES TO LOOK TO POLITICIANS AND VOTERS OF THE NOW MORIBUND CENTER AS A POSSIBLE SOURCE OF SUPPORT. FORMER UDC LEADERS HAVE TOLD US, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT GOVERNMENT INTERMEDIARIES HAVE SUGGESTED TO THEM THAT THEY CAN EXPECT TO TAKE UP PROFFERED GOG JOBS NO LATER THAN MID-SEPTEMBER -- A SUGGESTION THAT HAS LED MANY TO CONCLUDE THAT KARAMANLIS IS PLANNING ANOTHER CABINET RESHUFFLE FOR EARLY NEXT MONTH. BUT
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SUCH PROMISSARY NOTES HAVE BEEN DRIFTING AROUND FOR QUITE A LONG TIME AND NOT EVEN THOSE WHO HOLD THEM ARE CONFIDENT THAT THEY WILL BE ABLE TO CASH THEM IN SOON.

8. IN THE WEEKS AHEAD, THE PRE-ELECTORAL ATMOSPHERE WILL PROBABLY INTENSIFY. EVEN NOW THE GOVERNMENT AND THE OPPOSITION PARTIES EACH HAVE BEGUN TO EXCHANGE CHARGES THAT THE OTHER IS RESPONSIBLE FOR "POLARIZING" THE COUNTRY. AS THIS ATMOSPHERE INTENSIFIES, WE CAN EXPECT DEBATES OVER NATIONAL ISSUES -- INCLUDING FOREIGN POLICY -- WILL PROVIDE A BACKDROP FOR THESE ELECTIONS. IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES, THE GOG WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BECOME MORE CAUTIOUS IN ITS HANDLING OF ISSUES WHICH COULD HAVE IMPORTANT DOMESTIC REPERCUSSIONS, INCLUDING FOREIGN POLICY.
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